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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH UNION OF KURDS OF GEORGIA

Classified By: CDA, a.i., Mark X. Perry for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) On 25 March 2008, Poloff met with Vitali Nabiev (Angosi), chairman of the NGO Union of Kurds of Georgia. Nabiev's organization represents the Georgian Kurdish Diaspora in Tbilisi (about 30,000 people mainly in the capital whom he described as Yesids) and Iraqi Kurds in Kurdistan. His purpose in meeting U.S. Embassy contacts was to thank them for assistance to Kurds in Iraq and to promote more dialogue and interaction with younger Kurds who have a positive impression of the West, but so far have knowledge only of the East (Russia.) He voiced few concerns, although religious freedom and updating the national registry to include traditional Kurdish family names were discussed. End Summary.

Union of Kurds of Georgia

12. (SBU) Nabiev's organization, which was formed about a year ago, is one of approximately eight organizations in Georgia which represent Kurd interests. The Kurdish have been present in Georgia for centuries, many of them emigrating from Georgia to Russia in the last years for employment reasons. The Kurdish Diaspora primarily live in Tbilisi (90%), with the remainder sprinkled liberally throughout Georgia in lesser numbers. Nabiev said his organization, which employs five people (men and women), represents many younger Kurds. His primary goal in establishing contact is to expand dialogue with the West, as many Kurds have positive impressions of the U.S., but have traditionally only known the East (Russia). In his opinion, there is no dialogue currently between the U.S. Embassy and the Kurdish community. Nabiev described his organization as active, sitting on committees for minorities and religious freedom within the Public Defender's Office, and working positively to represent its constituents. Nabiev said that he firmly believed that he needs to work with the authorities to resolve issues, before bringing them to the attention of the international community.

What are the Kurds' concerns?

13. (SBU) Nabiev seemed reluctant to delve into too much detail about concerns, only mentioning the first and second items from the list below. According to the Public Defender's website, Kurds' principal concerns are:

- Adequate allocation of broadcasting time for Kurdish programming on television and radio
- Registration of Kurds traditional surnames in the public registry
- Problem of learning the mother tongue
- Preservation of Kurdish culture, language, and religion

Yesid Faith

14. (SBU) Nabiev said that there is no temple outside of Iraqi Kurdistan for those of the Yesid faith to pray. (Comment: Yesid is a religion closely associated with the Zoroastrian faith.) His organization had recently met with the mayor of Tbilisi about finding an acceptable location to build such a structure, but no solution had resulted. According to the Public Defender's web site, the Kurd Diaspora has applied to the state several times for land upon which to construct a religious building. The Head of Property Management Service of Tbilisi, Pikria Ugrekhelidze, has promised the Kurds to help find a location which would be appropriate. Nabiev added that the Kurd community is "trying to be careful not to irritate the Mayor of Tbilisi" and has assured local officials that practitioners of the Yesid faith would not be proselytizing in order to allay any perception that the religion is threatening to the prevailing Georgian Orthodox religion.

Kurdish Names in the Registry

15. (SBU) Members of the Kurd Diaspora met with representatives of the Civil Registry Office (Ministry of Justice) about updating registry records to permit the return of historical Kurd surnames. (Comment: Nabiev's historical Kurdish surname is Angosi.) Nabiev gave two reasons for wanting the updates. First, it is important to regain family names, but secondly, there are practical implications. For example, some Kurds have Armenian sounding names, which prevent them traveling easily to Azerbaijan and other areas for work. Previously the process for changing a name in the public registry required a certificate from the Special Commission of Ethnography which did a family genealogical search to verify lineage. This commission no longer exists. Therefore, no names can be updated in the registry. According to Nabiev a special law is necessary to address the issue. The Public Defender has promised to find a solution to the issue through cooperation with the Ethnographic Institute.

Mass Media

16. (SBU) Nabiev, a journalist and native Georgian speaker, did not seem overly concerned about lack of media coverage in the Kurdish language. He said that currently public radio carries 10 minutes of Kurdish language programming a week, and until recently he himself helped publish a newspaper in Russian, Georgian and Kurdish. Nabiev plans to resume this service again soon. He was hopeful that the pending appointment of a new director of public television would soon permit more frequent Kurdish language programming.

Other Contacts

17. (SBU) Nabiev has well-entrenched contacts with the Russian Embassy. He explained many Kurds currently reside in Russia and experience difficulties after communications and travel links between Georgia and Russia were severed. Nabiev has lobbied on behalf of these Kurds to the Russian Embassy. Nabiev planned to establish contact with the British Embassy to thank them for their assistance in Iraq and expressed regret that there is no South Korean Embassy in Tbilisi so he could do the same. (Comment: The Republic of Korea Zaytun Peace and Reconstruction Division has been present in Erbil, Kurdistan, since 2004. According to recent survey results listed on the Kurdistan Regional Government web site more than 80% of the people in Erbil would like the Koreans to extend their stay. End comment.)

Comment

18. (C) Nabiev was quick to establish up front that he was not meeting with Poloff to air a list of concerns or ask for grants. His primary reason was to establish more regular contact and dialogue. Poloff agreed to put him in contact with the Embassy's Public Affairs Section to get information on cultural and educational opportunities, offered to meet with representatives from the Kurdish Diaspora to learn of religious or minority discrimination issues, and welcomed meetings with members of the Kurdish community in outlying regions when Embassy officers are traveling in Georgia.
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